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# The Disruption of a Solidly Democratic State: Civil Rights and South Carolina Electoral Change, 1948-1972

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Between 1948 and 1972, South Carolina's normal pattern of voting in presidential elections underwent a realignment. From a solidly Democratic state that had not given the Democratic nominee less than 87 percent of its votes before 1948, South Carolina became a stronghold for Republican presidential candidates.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the factors that caused this realignment. The study contends that the abandonment of the "Southern position" on the racial issue by the national Democratic party and the ensuing promotion of civil rights by two Democratic Administrations comprise the major causal factors involved in this realignment.<sup>1</sup>

The bitter controversy over civil rights in the Democratic party that was manifest at the 1948 national convention had its roots in the early 1930s. One could go back to the Civil War or to the time of John C. Calhoun or to the beginning of slavery in North America; for the purposes of this study, the New Deal era is sufficient. An incident that illustrates what was to befall the Democratic party occurred on the floor of the U.S. Senate in 1938 when an anti-lynching proposal sponsored by Northern Democrats was under debate. Sen. James F. Byrnes of South Carolina reminded his listeners that a similar proposal had been sponsored in 1921 by Republican congressmen and at the time had been defeated with the aid of Northern Democrats. The reversal on the issue among Northern Democrats, he said, had come about because "90 percent of the Negroes in the North . . . are voting for Democratic candidates."<sup>2</sup> (The economic appeal of the New Deal had undermined the traditional Republican loyalty of black voters outside the South.) Byrnes hinted that though the South "had never voted for a Republican candidate," it might have to reappraise the situation. It is clear, he said, that "the white people in the South in supporting the Democratic party [had been guided by] the belief

<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on the civil rights issue is not to be interpreted as a total exclusion of economic class variables. James L. Sundquist's treatment of the South during these decades as exhibiting delayed reaction to the party realignment begun in the rest of the nation in the 1930s is a useful framework and one that does not contradict the emphasis of this study on the civil rights split in the Democratic party as paramount. South Carolina's preoccupation with race overshadowed the ongoing pull toward economic class voting begun by the New Deal. See Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1973), especially Chapter 12, "Aftershocks of the New Deal Earthquake — in the South," pp. 245-274.

<sup>2</sup> George Mowry, *Another Look at the Twentieth-Century South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), pp. 69-70.

that when problems affecting the Negro and the very soul of the South arose, they could depend upon the Democrats of the North to rally to their support . . .”<sup>3</sup>

In 1947, President Truman appointed a civil rights commission to study the condition of the Negro. Its recommendations were “a sweeping denunciation of all governmental and of some private sanctions of race discrimination or segregation.”<sup>4</sup> Truman called the report “an American charter of human freedom” and implemented many of its suggestions within his authority, such as integrating military units.<sup>5</sup>

### IN SEARCH OF AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE DEMOCRATS

The link between the 1948 Dixiecrat campaign and the civil rights position of President Truman and the national Democratic convention of 1948 is so clear that little elaboration is needed. Gov. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina quickly sized up the situation after Truman’s civil rights initiatives. He told a May 1948 gathering in Mississippi: “The leadership of the Democratic party may as well realize that the South’s electoral votes are no longer in the bag for the Democratic nominee.”<sup>6</sup> In accepting the States’ Rights presidential nomination, Thurmond declared: “There are not enough laws on the books of the nation, nor can there be enough laws, to break down segregation in the South.”<sup>7</sup> Thurmond swept South Carolina with 72.0 percent of the vote; Truman received 24.1; and the Republican nominee, Thomas E. Dewey, 3.8.<sup>8</sup>

In the years immediately following the 1948 revolt, the speculation concerning what that election meant for the future ran along three lines:<sup>9</sup>

- 1) It was the beginning of a quadrennial effort to deadlock the electoral college and demand concessions to the “Southern point of view.”
- 2) It was only a temporary bolt that would soon find the traditional adherents back in the Democratic party.
- 3) It was the beginning of a two-party South.

As George B. Tindall pointed out, “It proved, in fact, to be all of these things.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Francis Butler Simkins and Charles Pierce Roland, *A History of the South*, 4th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 589.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), 11 May 1948.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 July 1948.

<sup>8</sup> Svend Petersen, *A Statistical History of the American Presidential Elections* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1962). The county-level election results cited throughout were obtained in computer-readable form from the Inter-University Consortium for Political Research at the University of Michigan, to whom the author expresses his appreciation.

<sup>9</sup> George B. Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1972), p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



These three contradictory tendencies stand out clearly during the 1952 and 1956 elections. The shock of finding their traditional arrangement with the national Democratic party on segregation abrogated may have led to the blind rage of the Thurmond bolt, but the power realities of the situation appear to have always been evident to the state's members of Congress. In particular, they knew how impotent the civil rights advocates were in the Southern-dominated Senate. Through the 1960 election, the state Democratic leadership managed to prevent any top officeholder from bolting the party and, in fact, to win the state in all three elections for the national party nominee, if only by slim margins.

But the triumph of the pragmatic state party leadership during this decade was far from apparent in 1952. An examination of positions presented at the reconvened state Democratic convention in August 1952, after Gov. Adlai E. Stevenson had won the presidential nomination, is instructive. Both of South Carolina's United States senators urged the convention to back Stevenson. *The State*<sup>11</sup> reported Sen. Burnet R. Maybank told the delegates that remaining with the national party would keep Southern senators in a position where they could head off civil rights legislation. Maybank reminded the delegates that only acts of Congress, not party platforms, really count. Sen. Olin D. Johnston put it this way:

To me there is absolutely no difference between the aims and desires of the civil rights plank for both parties. Both are heading towards the same goal. Both have hidden teeth in them. Neither forms the South's viewpoint on this matter. . . . I am sticking to the Democratic nominees of the Democratic party.<sup>12</sup>

Other delegates, of lesser status in the state political hierarchy, felt differently. Francis Coleman, the mayor of Mount Pleasant in Charleston County, said:

How can we subscribe to the policies of the national convention? If we endorse the national party platform, it will be a mandate to the U.S. Supreme Court to do away with segregation in the South.<sup>13</sup>

Thomas P. Stoney rhetorically asked:

How can you repudiate a platform and then vote for the men on it? . . . Mr. Byrnes says the 1952 civil rights part is stiffer than in 1948, and you come with your mouths open and think with your bellies and not with your brains.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *The State*, 7 August 1952.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

Governor Byrnes told the convention it would be wrong not to certify Stevenson as the state party's candidate, the purpose for reconvening the convention. The convention took the advice of Byrnes and certified the national ticket.<sup>15</sup>

Disenchanted Democrats started gathering petitions to secure a ballot spot for Eisenhower separate from that of the Republican party. By Labor Day, 1952, these "South Carolinians for Eisenhower" had 53,000 signers; only 10,000 were needed.<sup>16</sup>

The regular Republican organization in the state was little more than a "letterhead" operation. In fact, in 1952, the GOP state chairman held a full-time job as chairman of the Board of Public Welfare in Washington, D.C. His South Carolina residence consisted of a room he maintained in his mother's house in Pickens County.<sup>17</sup>

In mid-September, Governor Byrnes announced he would support Eisenhower. He gave a number of reasons, including Eisenhower's stature as a world leader. Among his stated reasons was the following:

The civil rights legislation advocated by the Democratic administration has not seriously disturbed many well informed people in the South. They realize those bills could not be passed as long as in the United States Senate there was no limit on debate. . . . Stevenson now states that while he could not make the decision, as President he would use all of his influence to "encourage Congress" to put an end to unlimited debate.<sup>18</sup>

Shortly after Byrnes' statement, Eisenhower visited the state capital, an event heralded as the first campaign visit ever of a presidential nominee of either party to South Carolina. During his speech, Eisenhower made no mention of civil rights.<sup>19</sup>

Eisenhower received 46.4 percent of the vote under the Independents' ballot line and 2.8 percent on the GOP line. His 49.2 percent total was still 5,000 votes short of Stevenson. Behind this strong Eisenhower showing, as the statements of state politicians suggested, was the abrupt turn in the national Democratic party away from supporting the Southern demand that their segregation and subjugation of blacks was no business of the national government and its laws.

Donald S. Strong has shown the importance of Southern urban areas voting Republican during the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> This phenomenon of urban Republicanism was present in the state. But, as Figure 1 shows, Eisenhower ran

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *The State*, 4 September 1952.

<sup>17</sup> Neal R. Peirce, *The Deep South States of America: People, Politics, and Power in the Deep South* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974), p. 400.

<sup>18</sup> *The State*, 19 September 1952.

<sup>19</sup> *The State*, 1 October 1952.

<sup>20</sup> Donald S. Strong, *Urban Republicanism in the South* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama, Bureau of Public Administration, 1960).

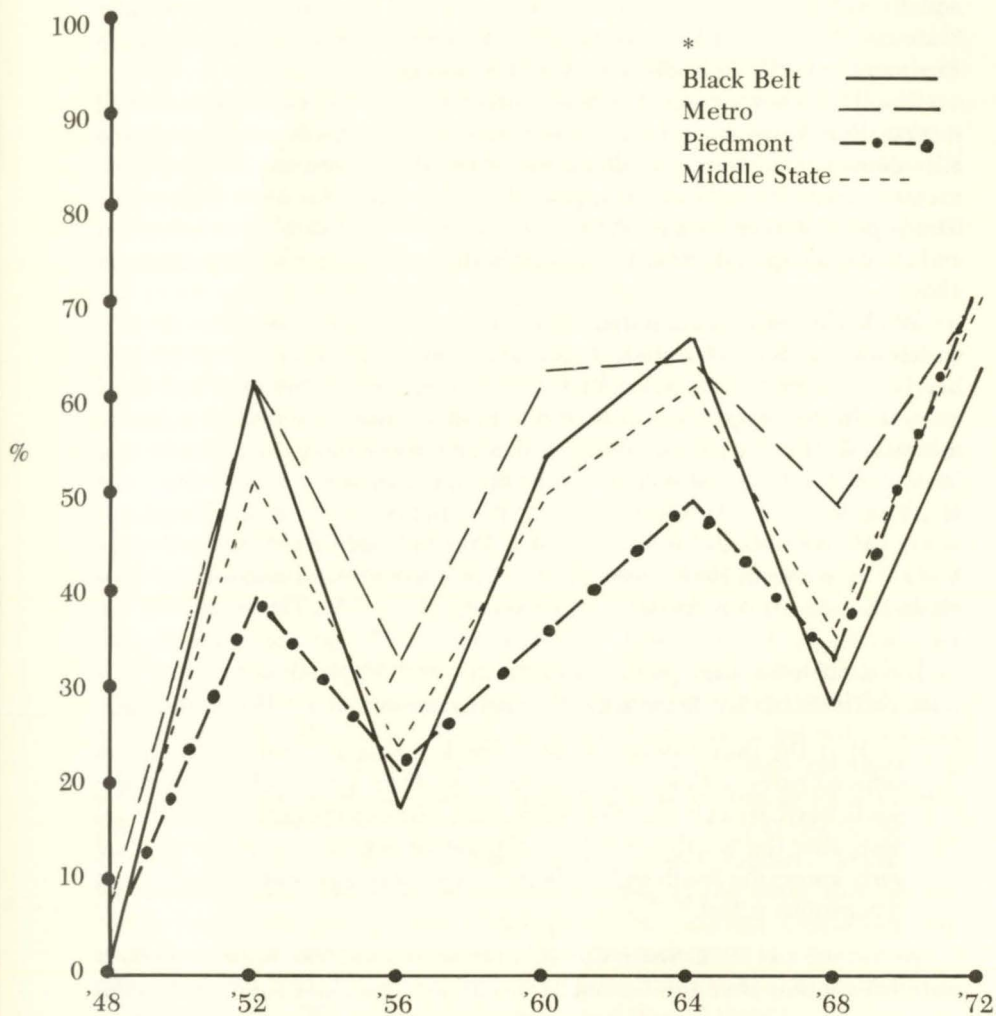


FIGURE 1: Republican Vote By County Type, 1948-1972

\*For a listing of counties by type, see Footnote 21.



equally well in both Black Belt and Metro counties,<sup>21</sup> and even in the Middle State counties he had a simple majority. Eisenhower's weak showing in the Piedmont counties held the state for Stevenson.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision, led by Eisenhower's appointee as chief justice, Earl Warren, outlawing segregated public schools no longer made Eisenhower's candidacy the vehicle for protest it had been in 1952, when the greatest danger to segregation appeared to come from Northern Democrats. The hope of Byrnes for Eisenhower on civil rights had proved unwarranted and the former governor turned against both the President and Stevenson in 1956.

While the 1952 election highlighted one of the three contradictory tendencies — that South Carolina Democrats could remain loyal to their party, if barely — the 1956 election demonstrated the force of the other two tendencies as well. In newspaper accounts of the 1952 election, Thurmond is hardly mentioned, though he attended the Chicago convention. In 1950, he had been defeated by Senator Johnston in his bid to unseat the then first-term senator in the Democratic primary. In fact, in 1948 when Thurmond began his active role defending the South against Truman's civil rights initiatives, as V. O. Key wrote in 1949, "Sage South Carolina politicians nodded and concluded that Strom was running for the Senate."<sup>22</sup> In 1956, Thurmond was the Democratic party's nominee for the U.S. Senate. The former bolter showed he had a different conception from Johnston and Maybank as to where the power of the South lay. Prior to the 1956 national convention, Thurmond said:

It is the desire of our state to work within the framework of the national party without going so far as to destroy the only weapon the South has that can bring effective results — fear on the part of the national party that the South will take independent action. . . . If the national party knows the South will not bolt . . . then it is apparent our fight to get concessions is lost.<sup>23</sup>

As in 1948 and 1952, South Carolina Democrats in 1956 reconvened their state convention after the national convention. The chief controversy cen-

<sup>21</sup> In this study the state's forty-six counties are divided into four types: *Black Belt* — Allendale, Bamberg, Calhoun, Clarendon, Colleton, Edgefield, Fairfield, Georgetown, Hampton, Jasper, Lee, McCormick, Marion, Orangeburg, and Williamsburg — these counties contained a Negro population of over 50 percent in the 1960 census; *Piedmont* — Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Chester, Chesterfield, Greenwood, Kershaw, Lancaster, Laurens, Newberry, Oconee, Pickens, Saluda, Spartanburg, Union, and York — these counties lying above the fall line in the Piedmont plateau contain the state's highest percentage of persons employed in manufacturing; *Metro* — Charleston, Greenville, and Richland (Columbia) — the state's three largest urban areas; and *Middle State* — Aiken, Barnwell, Beaufort, Berkeley, Darlington, Dillon, Dorchester, Florence, Horry, Lexington, Marlboro, and Sumter — these counties represent a middle ground between the heavily manufacturing Piedmont and the high Negro concentration of the Black Belt.

<sup>22</sup> V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 150.

<sup>23</sup> *The State*, 22 July 1956.

tered on a resolution by Shepard K. Nash of Sumter. The Nash resolution stated that any South Carolina Democrat could vote for (and presumably endorse or actively campaign for) someone other than the Democratic presidential nominee in the fall and not jeopardize his state party status. This was a measure designed by politicians to protect themselves since, obviously, a citizen could vote in secret for whomever he chose no matter what the convention did on this point.

U.S. Sen. Thomas A. Wofford, a short-term appointee, speaking against the resolution, charged: "Eisenhower has done more damage in three and a half years in the South than Mrs. Roosevelt can do in twenty years. . . . We never have in the South gotten anything out of the Republican party."<sup>24</sup> Gov. George Bell Timmerman, Jr., the successor to Byrnes who had recently called for federal transportation of Negroes to Northern states, where he said "race mixing" was favored,<sup>25</sup> told the convention: "The South made significant gains at Chicago, and these gains marked a turning point in political attitudes toward the South." Senator Johnston told the convention: "We can best serve the people of South Carolina by remaining in the Democratic party."<sup>26</sup> During a visit to the State House in late October, Johnston put the party establishment's argument as explicitly as it appears anywhere in the published record: "We can fight for segregation better through the Democratic party than in any other way."<sup>27</sup>

Two other statements from the reconvened convention demonstrate the bitterness present at the gathering. Lonnie A. Causy of Horry County shouted at what he called the "Eisenhowercrats" in the balcony to get out. "I came here because I love Adlai Stevenson," he exclaimed. Causy promised the delegates "to stump South Carolina against Jimmy Byrnes as I did in 1952 when the state was saved for Stevenson," and, according to the newspaper account, "he jeered at Senator Thurmond as a States' Righter." William T. Jones of Greenwood told the delegates, according to *The State*, that "if they couldn't support the nominees of the party they weren't Democrats. He suggested that if they wanted to vote for independents to get into the independent party, and, if they wanted to vote for Eisenhower, to get into the Republican party."<sup>28</sup> The Nash resolution was defeated 168½ to 147½, and, as the election showed, a number of South Carolinians took Jones up on his convention offer.

Immediately after the state convention, a hundred delegates met to start a ballot petition under the name of "South Carolinians for Independent Electors." The leadership of this movement was occupied by officials of the State Association of (White) Citizens Councils. Farley Smith of Lynchburg, a son of

<sup>24</sup> *The State*, 28 August 1956.

<sup>25</sup> Simkins and Roland, *History of the South*, p. 596.

<sup>26</sup> *The State*, 28 August 1956.

<sup>27</sup> *The State*, 25 October 1956.

<sup>28</sup> *The State*, 28 August 1956.



Sen. Cotton Ed Smith, became chairman of the movement. After securing their ballot position, this group — whose blatantly racist appeal needs no elaboration — pledged its electors to Sen. Harry F. Byrd of Virginia for president and U.S. Rep. John Bell Williams of Mississippi for vice president.

The Republican party in the state, by now under the leadership of resident South Carolinians, several of them retired industrialists, ran an Eisenhower campaign that emphasized conservative economic issues. The Democrats, likewise, stressed New Deal issues and played down the racial issue in handling Stevenson's appeal.

The returns of this three-way election in the state demonstrate that each of the three tendencies cited above and advocated by various political leaders — stay with the Democrats, join the Republican party, or bolt — all securely tied to the impact of outside forces threatening segregation, had sizable support among the voters. Stevenson won the state with a plurality of 45.4 percent. The Independents for Byrd finished second with 29.5 percent, and the Republicans were third with 25.2. The fact that Stevenson nearly held his own — in the Piedmont counties he did not drop at all (see Figure 2) — directs attention to the massive defection from Eisenhower to the white citizens council's slate. As shown in Figure 1, the most dramatic drop in Eisenhower's vote from 1952 to 1956 came in the Black Belt counties. Among these counties, with over 50 percent of their population black, few of whom voted, Eisenhower's vote dropped from 62 percent to 17 percent. Even in the Metro counties, the decline for Eisenhower was nearly 30 percent. While the 1956 Eisenhower vote indicated that the GOP was, in a sense, on the rise, it also suggested how much of the 1952 Eisenhower vote was a reaction to the changing national attitude toward the South's subjugation of the Negro.

### NO CLEAR CHOICE APPEARS

In the four years leading up to the 1960 election, a number of factors were important for discouraging a large exodus from the Democratic party by South Carolina's politicians. Because of the one-party system on the state level and the rule of seniority in Congress, the state's congressmen and senators held important positions of leadership in Washington that would be lost if they switched parties. The importance of seniority for the segregation fight was constantly emphasized by these politicians. In the state itself, the Democratic politicians held "a vested interest in the office-holding industry."<sup>29</sup> And finally, the Republican party, the party of Lincoln and Reconstruction, did not offer a viable alternative on the race issue. Eisenhower's action in Little Rock and his support for civil rights legislation offered no comfort to those South Carolinians ready to flock to any candidate who gave them hope of maintaining the Negro in an inferior position, that sizable segment that jumped from Thurmond to Eisenhower to Byrd in eight years.

<sup>29</sup> Tindall, *Disruption of the Solid South*, p. 40.

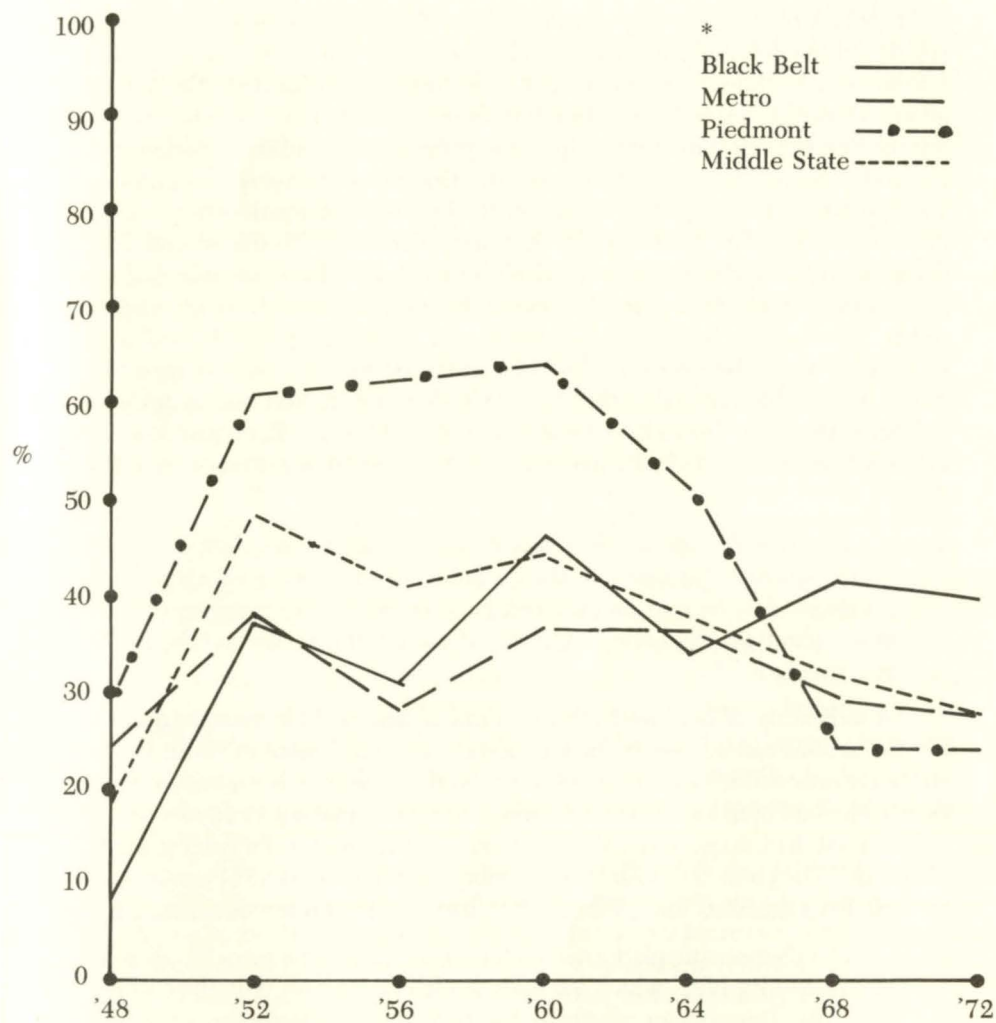


FIGURE 2: Democratic Vote By County Type, 1948-1972

\*For a listing of counties by type, see Footnote 21.

This lack of choice on race was clearly evident in 1960, and this election stands out as one in which the civil rights issue does not dominate. The main reason: Senator John F. Kennedy and Vice President Richard M. Nixon held almost identical civil rights positions. Both men traveled to Columbia, marking the first time in state history opposing presidential candidates had visited the state. (Kennedy's appearance was the first for a Democratic nominee.) Two quotations from accounts of their visits show that segregationists received no outward comfort from either. Kennedy declared: "Some of you may disagree with my views [on civil rights], but at least I have not changed my principles in an election year." He added that progress must be made on civil rights "if we are to be true to our ideals and responsibilities." Presidential leadership would be necessary for such progress, he said, and charged that Nixon was double-talking on the issue: "Up there he stresses how quickly he will act in this area. Down here he says he knows this is a difficult problem."<sup>30</sup> *The State* gave only the following report of Nixon's Columbia mention of the issue:

The Vice President referred only incidentally to civil rights. He said he recognized that many in the audience would not agree with all his positions. But he said he believed he is respected by Southerners as a man "who talks the same way in the West and the South and the North and the East."<sup>31</sup>

An indication of how well the two sides balanced their presentations in South Carolina can be seen in the election eve announcement of Smith for the white citizens council claiming neutrality in the contest and urging voters to do what he said Senator Thurmond (who was running that fall for re-election as a Democrat) had suggested, "Vote your conscience and for the good of South Carolina." The council did list "the positions" of the two sides. The first point in their list suggested that perhaps they had a slight preference after all:

The Democratic platform calls for integration of the races "in all areas of community life," which we take to include homes, churches, clubs, etc. The Republican platform limits itself to integration of public facilities.<sup>32</sup>

Another cue, besides Thurmond and the white citizens council's "neutrality," was former Governor Byrnes' endorsement of Nixon at the candidate's State House rally. As correlation data presented below show, Nixon's electoral support in the state corresponded strongly to that of the Byrd slate.

During the 1960 campaign, the state's most prominent Democratic officeholders (except Thurmond) made a vigorous effort for Kennedy. The Massachusetts senator's selection of Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas as his

<sup>30</sup> *The State*, 11 October 1960.

<sup>31</sup> *The State*, 4 November 1960.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



running mate was an important concession to Southern Democratic leaders. That Kennedy and Johnson — two men who because of their civil rights actions in office were to become “traitors” for many white South Carolinians in the 1960s — carried South Carolina, if only by a little over two percentage points (51.2 to 48.8), is a tribute to the traditional pull of party loyalty buoyed by the influence of the party leadership, particularly in the Piedmont counties. The state Democratic leaders were able to accomplish this because the Republican presidential candidate offered no clear choice on civil rights. When such a choice was offered four years later, despite the last vigorous effort for the national ticket by the leadership, traditional Democratic loyalty was not enough to win.

To understand how state leaders were able to hold South Carolina in 1960 for Kennedy-Johnson, it is important to remember that the electorate did not identify the mild civil rights developments of the 1950s with a Democratic president. While Truman was an aberration to many South Carolinians, there was some reason to hope that the party of Jefferson and Jackson would again be led by a man who would treat the South’s racial “institutions” — as Franklin Roosevelt had done — as beyond the realm of the federal government’s responsibility. This was to prove to be wishful thinking, but it was a plausible rationalization that may have helped to win the state for Kennedy.

To follow this one step further, it needs to be emphasized how slowly the outside political challenges to segregation in the South were actually affecting the dual society there. In 1960, South Carolina treated blacks little better than in 1940. The power of the federal government had yet to be brought to bear in sufficient strength to effect the changes that were portended by the resolutions of Northern Democrats and the unenforced pronouncements of the Supreme Court.<sup>33</sup>

In the Black Belt, Nixon returned to the Republican party much of the support lost to the Byrd group, but still ran 8 percent below Eisenhower there in 1952. In the Metro counties, the vice president increased slightly on the 1952 showing of Eisenhower. Again, the Democratic nominee’s victory rested on strong support in the Piedmont counties, as is shown by Figure 2.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF GOLDWATER’S CANDIDACY

In 1964, many South Carolina voters felt they had a choice on race. President Johnson was a powerful force pushing the Civil Rights Bill through Congress; Senator Barry Goldwater opposed it. Despite Goldwater’s protestation that he was “unalterably opposed to discrimination of any sort” and voted against the bill because parts of it “fly in the face of the Constitution,”<sup>34</sup> his vote was heralded in South Carolina by both Republicans and those bolters who felt dissatisfied with the lack of choice on the race issue in 1960. Smith of

<sup>33</sup> Simkins and Roland, *History of the South*, p. 598.

<sup>34</sup> *The State*, 19 June 1964.

the white citizens council asserted: "Independents should join under the banner of the Republican party. . . . The issues are clearly drawn."<sup>35</sup>

But in competition with Goldwater and other early Republican "Southern strategists," the first years of the 1960s witnessed the rise of a Southern segregationist hero who was to become a factor in every presidential race starting in 1964, Gov. George Wallace of Alabama. Over 25,000 petition signatures had been secured — more than enough — by July 1964 to put Wallace on the ballot in South Carolina as an independent presidential candidate. But immediately after the Republican party nominated Goldwater, Wallace withdrew his candidacy.<sup>36</sup> Goldwater's candidacy forced Wallace out. Wallace's South Carolina supporters issued the following statement after the withdrawal:

And be it resolved that . . . knowing that the Democrats sponsored the Civil Rights Bill and in view of the fact that Sen. Barry Goldwater voted against the Civil Rights Bill . . . we, a group of South Carolina Independent Democrats, wholeheartedly endorse Sen. Goldwater for President . . .<sup>37</sup>

The 1964 election was to be the last in which the state's major Democratic politicians closed ranks behind a national candidate. Senator Johnston vigorously campaigned for President Johnson, who visited the state. Senator Johnston fought the Civil Rights Bill to the end and declared it "unenforceable" when the fight was lost.<sup>38</sup> But he stuck by his party loyalty to the extent of seconding Senator Humphrey's vice presidential nomination at the Atlantic City convention.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, party chairman Yancey McLeod put the argument for supporting the Johnson-Humphrey ticket in bread-and-butter terms:

I hope that every office-holder, office seeker and the state, city and county employees will realize that South Carolina in this matter is a two-party state and that a Republican victory in November will almost undoubtedly precipitate Republican opposition two years from now in the whole political spectrum . . .<sup>40</sup>

The most important event of the 1964 campaign for South Carolina politics, apart from the Goldwater candidacy itself, was Democratic Senator

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *The State*, 20 July 1964.

<sup>37</sup> *The State*, 30 August 1964.

<sup>38</sup> *The State*, 16 August 1964.

<sup>39</sup> *The State*, 28 August 1964.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* For a discussion of the connection between the state's realignment in presidential elections and statewide electoral change, see Chapter V in my M.A. thesis, "The Disruption of a Solidly Democratic State: Civil Rights and South Carolina Electoral Change, 1948-1974," Vanderbilt University, 1975. This thesis — on which the present article is based — was prepared under the direction of Professors J. Leiper Freeman and Avery Leiserson, to whom the author expresses his appreciation for their generous assistance.



Thurmond's action. Not only did he back Goldwater — he introduced him at a Columbia election eve rally — but, the former Dixiecrat switched his party affiliation and became a Republican. The passage of the Civil Rights Act had proven that his conception of where power lay for the South was superior to Senator Johnston's. (The aging Byrnes also made a campaign appearance for Goldwater.)

Thus, the presidential election in South Carolina in 1964 was dominated by race. Bernard Cosman supports this interpretation of the importance of race to the Goldwater victory in the state (with 58.9 percent of the vote), the first Republican to win the state's electoral votes since Reconstruction:

In 1964, the Deep-South vote polarized around race. The Goldwater candidacy alienated Negroes, while simultaneously bringing together the white voters from all status levels who had been angered by the racial policies of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.<sup>41</sup>

As Figure 1 shows, the Black Belt counties gave Goldwater 65 percent of their votes, 10 percent more than Nixon received there. In this election, for the first time since 1948, the Democratic vote in the Piedmont dropped. Even with the 14 percent decline in the Piedmont, Johnson still won a slim majority among these counties. Cosman pointed out that throughout the South, Goldwater ran below Nixon in metropolitan areas.<sup>42</sup> The Metro vote for Goldwater in South Carolina, however, rose to nearly 65 percent, a slight increase over Nixon's 1960 vote there.

### CORRELATION EVIDENCE OF CONTINUITY

During the five elections discussed thus far, there has been much fluctuation in the Democratic and anti-Democratic vote. However, a degree of continuity can be observed by introducing correlations<sup>43</sup> between the twelve candidates who contested these elections in South Carolina. Pearson's product-moment correlations between the county-level votes of Truman, Stevenson, Kennedy, and Johnson, as shown in Table 1, indicate that in this era of change, the Democratic candidates show strong consistency among themselves in the patterns of their voting strength throughout the state.

The consistency on the Democratic side is in marked contrast with a similar presentation of the Republican candidates in Table 2. Comparing Dewey, Eisenhower, Nixon, and Goldwater, one is not presented with a similar picture of consistency.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Cosman, *Five States for Goldwater: Continuity and Change in Southern Voting Patterns* (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 90.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>43</sup> Correlation coefficients range from +1.0 to -1.0. A coefficient near zero indicates no relationship; a coefficient approaching +1.0 indicates a close correspondence between the votes of the two candidates in the 46 counties, and vice versa for -1.0. For a detailed explanation of this technique, see Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., *Social Statistics*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1972), pp. 361-427.



TABLE 1  
*Correlations Among Democratic Candidates, 1948-1972*

	'48	'52	'56	'60	'64	'68	'72	Wallace '68
'48	1.0	.68	.60	.63	.70	-.46	-.43	.38
'52		1.0	.88	.80	.72	-.58	-.49	.75
'56			1.0	.86	.74	-.57	-.49	.73
'60				1.0	.82	-.41	-.23	.68
'64					1.0	-.27	-.17	.48
'68						1.0	.95	-.60
'72							1.0	-.49

TABLE 2  
*Correlations Among Republican Candidates, 1948-1972*

	'48	'52 <sup>a</sup>	'56	'60	'64	'68	'72	Wallace '68
'48	1.0	-.03	.60	.11	-.21	.36	.19	-.21
'52 <sup>a</sup>		1.0	.05	.80	.72	.18	-.50	-.75
'56			1.0	.33	.07	.63	.32	-.29
'60				1.0	.82	.41	-.25	-.68
'64					1.0	.22	-.18	-.48
'68						1.0	.52	-.44
'72							1.0	.49

<sup>a</sup> Combines Eisenhower's two slates.

TABLE 3  
*Correlations Showing Dixiecrat-to-Republican Transition:  
Thurmond '48, Eisenhower '52, Byrd '56,  
Nixon '60, Goldwater '64*

	'48	'52 <sup>a</sup>	'56	'60	'64
'48	1.0	.64	.65	.57	.70
'52 <sup>a</sup>		1.0	.86	.80	.72
'56			1.0	.71	.71
'60				1.0	.82
'64					1.0

<sup>a</sup> Combines Eisenhower's two slates.

However, when one substitutes Thurmond in 1948 for Dewey, and Byrd for Eisenhower in 1956, another pattern of consistency is discernible (see Table 3). This series of five candidates may be called the Dixiecrat-to-Republican transition.

### THE REALIGNMENT

The correlation matrices in Tables 1 and 2 indicate also that between the 1964 and the 1968 elections a complete break with past county-level voting patterns occurred in South Carolina. The time-series graphs (Figures 1 and 2) isolate the major shifts to the Black Belt and the Piedmont counties. Thus, the realignment favoring the Republicans<sup>44</sup> evident in 1964 underwent a sharp intra-state transformation by 1968, a transformation that continued to favor the GOP and that remained stable in the 1972 election.

The study has shown that the main thrust of the realignment up to the 1964 election came from the abandonment of the "Southern position" on civil rights by the national Democrats and from the presentation of a Republican "choice" on civil rights in 1964.<sup>45</sup> The 1964-1968 intra-state transformation — that is, the continuation and the completion of the realignment — resulted from the substantive impact of federal efforts, led by a Democratic President, to aid the Southern Negro.

In the 1968 election, Nixon carried the state with 38.1 percent; Wallace was second with 32.3; and the Democratic nominee, Humphrey, ran third with 29.6 percent. . Part of the intra-state transformation occurred in the Black Belt counties. The Black Belt went in four years from the lowest area of support for the Democratic nominee to the highest in 1968 (see Figure 2). This flip-flop was the direct result of the increase in black voting power encouraged by the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In 1958, 13.0 percent of the registered voters in the Black Belt were Negroes; in 1968, the figure had risen to 41.4 percent. The newly enfranchised blacks voted almost unanimously for Humphrey.<sup>46</sup>

The other major part of the intra-state transformation that accompanied the realignment process between 1964 and 1968 was the sharp decline of Democratic support in the Piedmont, making these counties the weakest for Humphrey (they had been the strongest for Johnson four years before). The top percentage of the Piedmont vote in 1968 went to Wallace with 41 percent. In 1972, with Wallace sidelined recuperating from an assassination attack, the Democratic nominee, Sen. George McGovern, did no better there than

<sup>44</sup> While the Republican party's presidential nominee is the beneficiary of this realignment, one qualification is necessary. If Governor Wallace is again a presidential candidate in the ballot, his support will certainly be large in South Carolina and damage the GOP nominee.

<sup>45</sup> *Report of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1959*, pp. 572-573; Chester W. Bain, "South Carolina: Partisan Prelude," in William C. Havard, ed., *The Changing Politics of the South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), pp. 598-599.

<sup>46</sup> Donald L. Fowler, "The 1968 General Election in South Carolina," *The University of South Carolina Governmental Review* 11 (May 1969), p. 4.

Humphrey. An examination of the 1968 Wallace appeal in these Piedmont counties — with their large white blue-collar population — will show, once again, the importance of the race issue for understanding electoral change in the state.

It has not been the approach of this study to concentrate on economic class voting (see Footnote 1) through precinct analysis. But precinct analysis is useful here to indicate that Wallace's vote in the Piedmont came heavily from blue-collar districts. Donald L. Fowler reported that of 82 selected blue-collar precincts in the Piedmont, Wallace received 48.3 percent of the vote, Nixon 29.2, and Humphrey 22.5. These same precincts gave Johnson 59.5 percent in 1964 and Kennedy 74.1 percent in the 1960 election.<sup>47</sup>

While this author has refrained from criticizing the interpretations of others — choosing rather to present his own findings — one exception must be made. Chester Bain's conclusion concerning the decline of the national Democrats in the Piedmont counties needs to be mentioned because it represents the only widely available published reference to this question in the South Carolina context and because it is wrong. Bain wrote:

Because of the low percentage of Negroes in the Piedmont counties it would seem that some variable other than race caused this continuing shift of voters from the Democratic Party to the candidates of other political parties. As suggested earlier, that variable seems to be an economic one.<sup>48</sup>

It is the contention of this study that Wallace's appeal in the Piedmont can be explained in the context of the substantive impact of the civil rights movement during the mid-1960s and the reaction by whites in this last stronghold for national Democrats to gains by blacks.

In 1963, there were 365,300 white students and 265,300 black students attending public schools in South Carolina. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that not one school in the state was racially integrated in that year.<sup>49</sup> South Carolina had remained a "legally" segregated society for a full decade after the Brown decision. No statistic can possibly convey the tension that existed in the state during the mid-1960s or the feelings of both races as they attempted to come to grips with a new type of relationship, one decreed from outside. For lower status whites in the state there had always been one blessing: they were at least above the "colored people." That was fast changing and many whites bitterly resented it.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. Fowler has also written a book dealing with most of the elections covered here; his approach differs markedly from the one presented in this study. See Fowler, *Presidential Voting in South Carolina 1948-1964* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Bureau of Governmental Research, 1966).

<sup>48</sup> Bain, "South Carolina: Partisan Prelude," in Havard, ed., *The Changing Politics of the South*, p. 611.

<sup>49</sup> *Report of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1963*, pp. 64-65.



During the mid-1960s school integration became a reality in South Carolina, affecting nearly all formerly white schools, though in many cases only in token numbers at first.<sup>50</sup> Federal efforts were begun in these years under the Office of Economic Opportunity to assist Americans living in poverty; in South Carolina that meant a great many blacks. In the 1970 census, 49.7 percent of the state's blacks were classified as living below the poverty line. For whites the figure was 12.3 percent. (Nationally, the breakdown was black, 35.0 percent; white, 10.9 percent.) Fair employment efforts under federal initiative were pushed in behalf of Negroes, particularly in the manufacturing centers of the Piedmont. Although there were fewer blacks in the Piedmont than elsewhere in the state, they were still a substantial minority.<sup>51</sup>

Two studies of the Wallace vote elsewhere in the South support the conclusion that racism (particularly resentment of Negro gains by whites) was the chief motivating factor for much of the vote the segregationist governor of Alabama received in 1968. (Unfortunately, no South Carolina survey data exist to substantiate this interpretation.) Yung Wie and H. R. Mahood used survey data to study the 1968 election in Memphis. They concluded:

There are very significant relationships between racial attitudes and the Wallace vote. People for segregation and opposed to open housing and school integration supported Wallace.<sup>52</sup>

Robert D. Wrinkle and Jerry L. Polinard, using aggregate data from selected Texas counties, concluded:

We suggest that the Wallace vote, like the Thurmond vote of 1948, is a "dissent" vote and that it is closely related to a feeling of hostility toward blacks.<sup>53</sup>

And Wrinkle and Polinard further assert that Wallace benefited more from this protest vote than Nixon because Wallace provided an alternative for those not ready to completely renounce their loyalty to the Democratic party.<sup>54</sup>

It is not the contention of this study that the factors that were so disruptive for the national Democrats in South Carolina from 1948 to 1968 dominated the presidential candidacy of Senator McGovern in South Carolina. They did not in a manifest sense. McGovern's identification with more federal efforts to help minorities was sufficient to indicate to many who had voted against

<sup>50</sup> *Southern School Desegregation, 1966-67. A Report of the U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, July 1967.*

<sup>51</sup> In fact, the Negro population of the Piedmont had not declined as rapidly as the state average. For example, in Greenwood in 1950, the population of the county was 30.2 percent black; in 1970, it was 28.1 percent. In Spartanburg, the figures were 22.4 percent and 21.1 percent.

<sup>52</sup> Yung Wie and H. R. Mahood, "Racial Attitudes and the Wallace Vote: A Study of the 1968 Election in Memphis," *Polity* 3 (Summer 1971), p. 549.

<sup>53</sup> Robert D. Wrinkle and Jerry L. Polinard, "Populism and Dissent: The Wallace Vote in Texas," *Social Science Quarterly* 54 (September 1973), p. 320.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

Humphrey that they did not want McGovern either, as the election results showed. McGovern received only 27.4 percent of the state vote, roughly 10 percent below his poor national showing and 2.2 percent below Humphrey's vote in the state. One can see in Figure 2 that McGovern drew almost the same amount of support in each of the four types of counties as Humphrey. In fact, the two correlate at a remarkably high .95.

\* \* \*

This study has stressed differences among counties in order to analyze shifts in the South Carolina electorate. It is essential at this juncture to emphasize that though there were differences within the state, the Democratic presidential nominees were overwhelmingly rejected throughout the state in the last two elections of this period. The realignment has left the national Democrats a decided minority in South Carolina.

And, by viewing the entire twenty-four year period as a whole, this study has demonstrated how the civil rights, or race, issue was at the heart of the electoral changes that took place in South Carolina. The circumstances of this realignment were perhaps unique, as the entire racial question occupies a unique place in American society. But the fury with which the preoccupation with race dominated South Carolina voting for president cannot be overlooked.

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